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395/200.48, 200.66, 200.6, 200.31, 200.49,
200.57, 200.62, 200.47; 707/200, 201, 204,
203, 10, 104

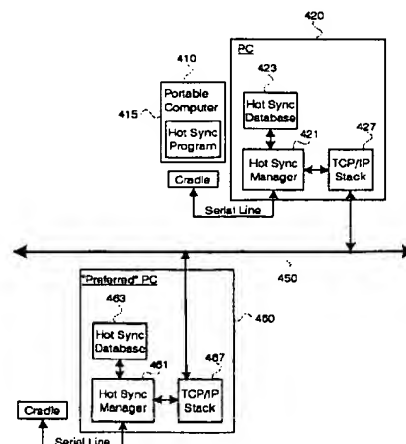
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Blakely, Sokoloff, Taylor & Zafman LLP

A tightly integrated the palmtop computer system and personal computer system is disclosed. The palmtop computer system and personal computer system synchronize with each other to share information. The synchronization software recognizes different synchronization environments including: synchronizing multiple palmtop computer systems with a single personal computer system, synchronizing a single palmtop computer system with multiple personal computer systems, synchronizing a palmtop computer system with a remote personal computer system across a network using a local personal computer system, and remotely synchronizing with a personal computer system across a telephone line. The synchronization software handles each different synchronization environment appropriately with minimal user interaction.

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14 Claims, 10 Drawing Sheets

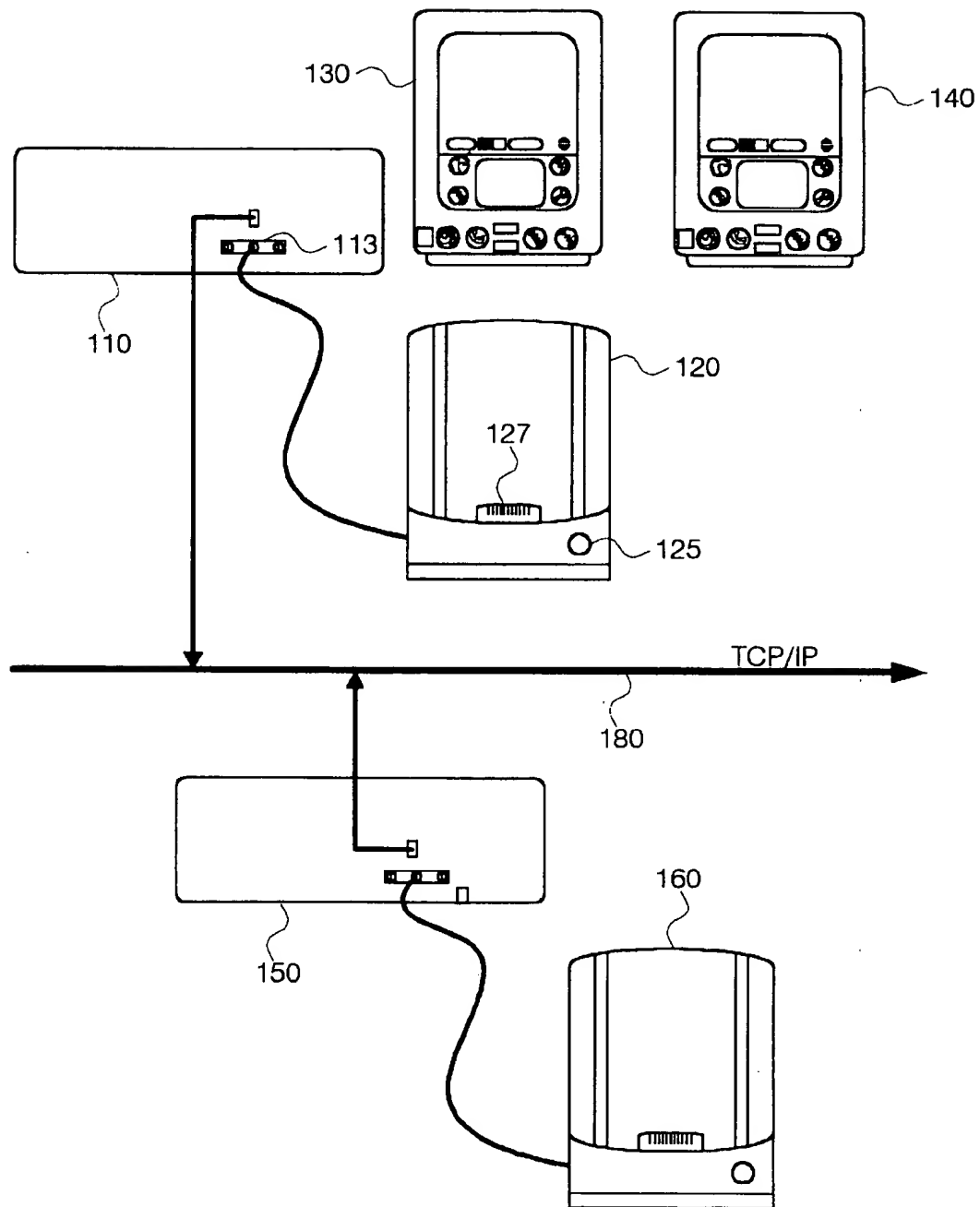


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*Figure 1*

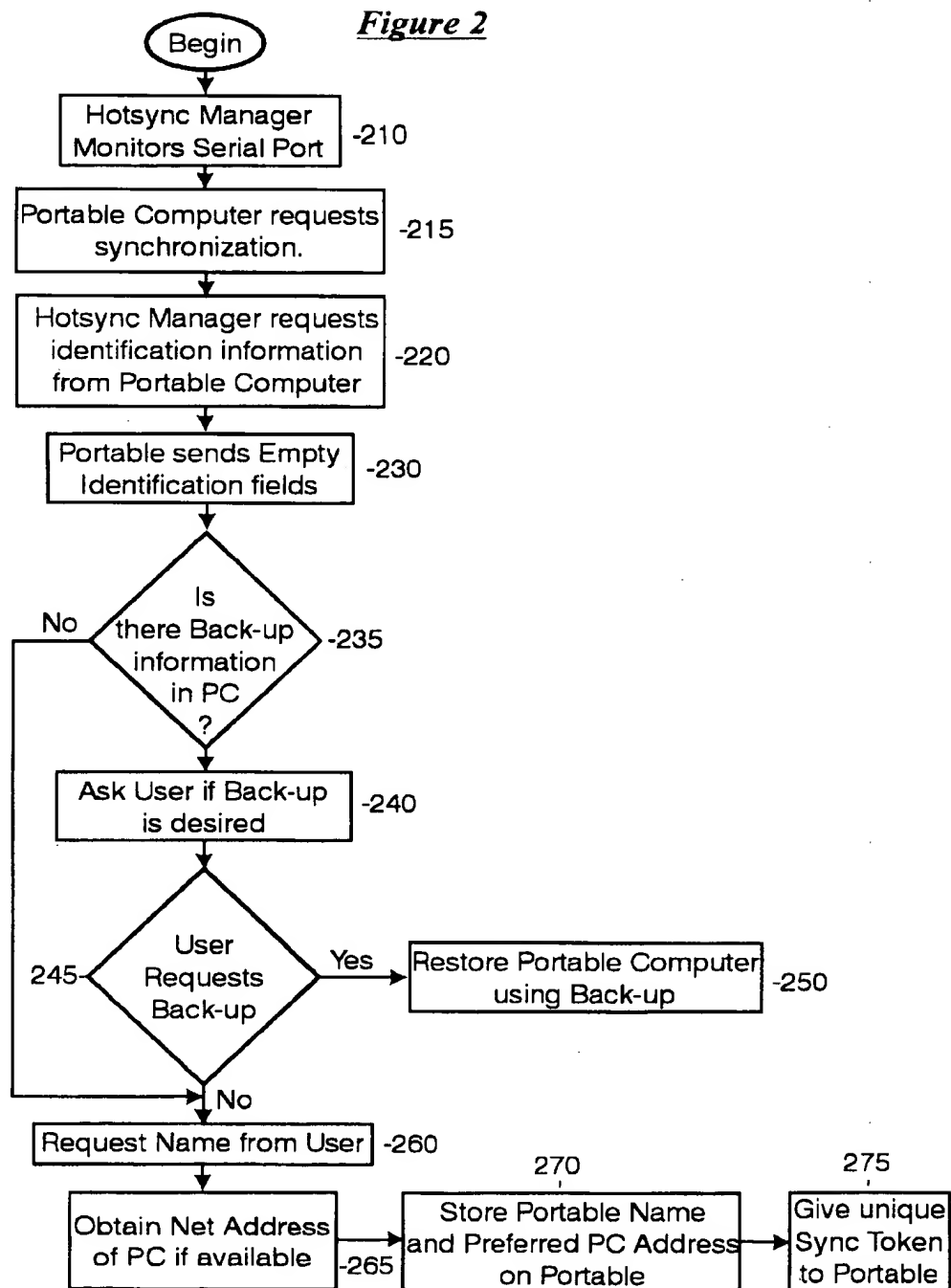


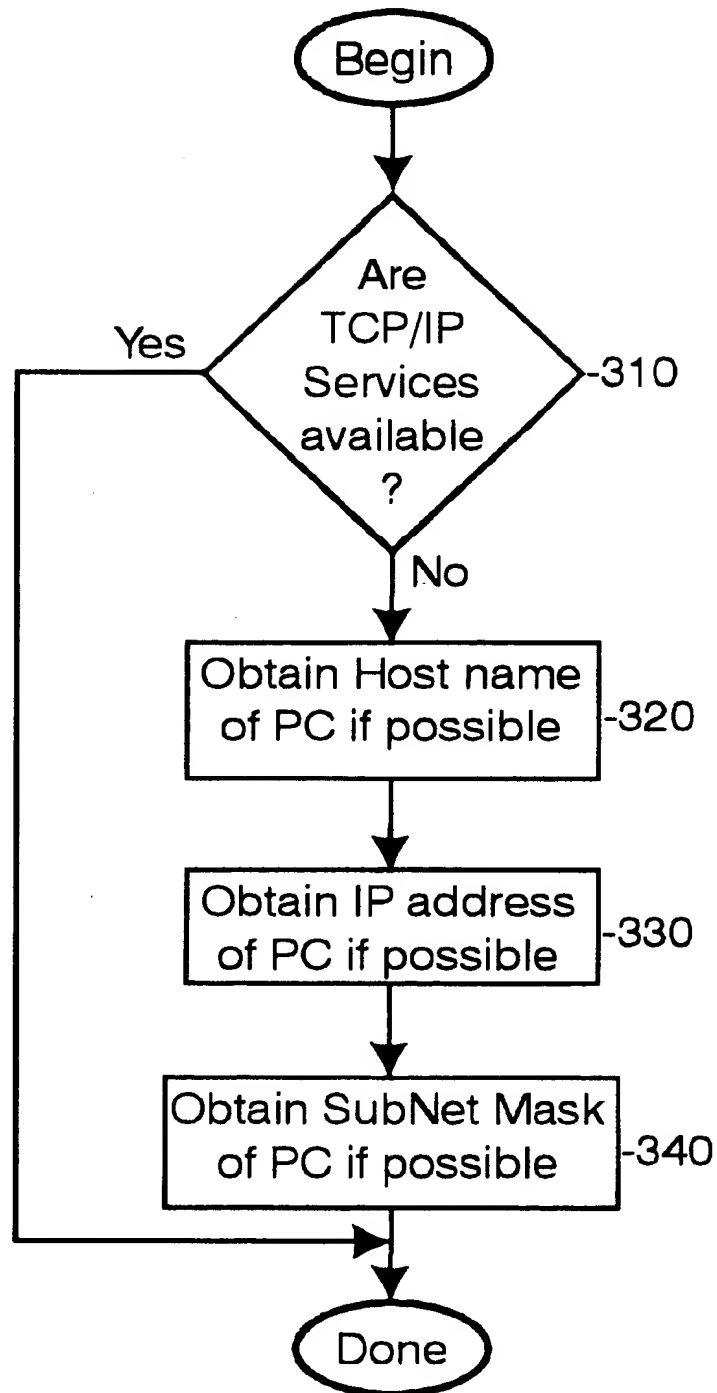
Figure 3

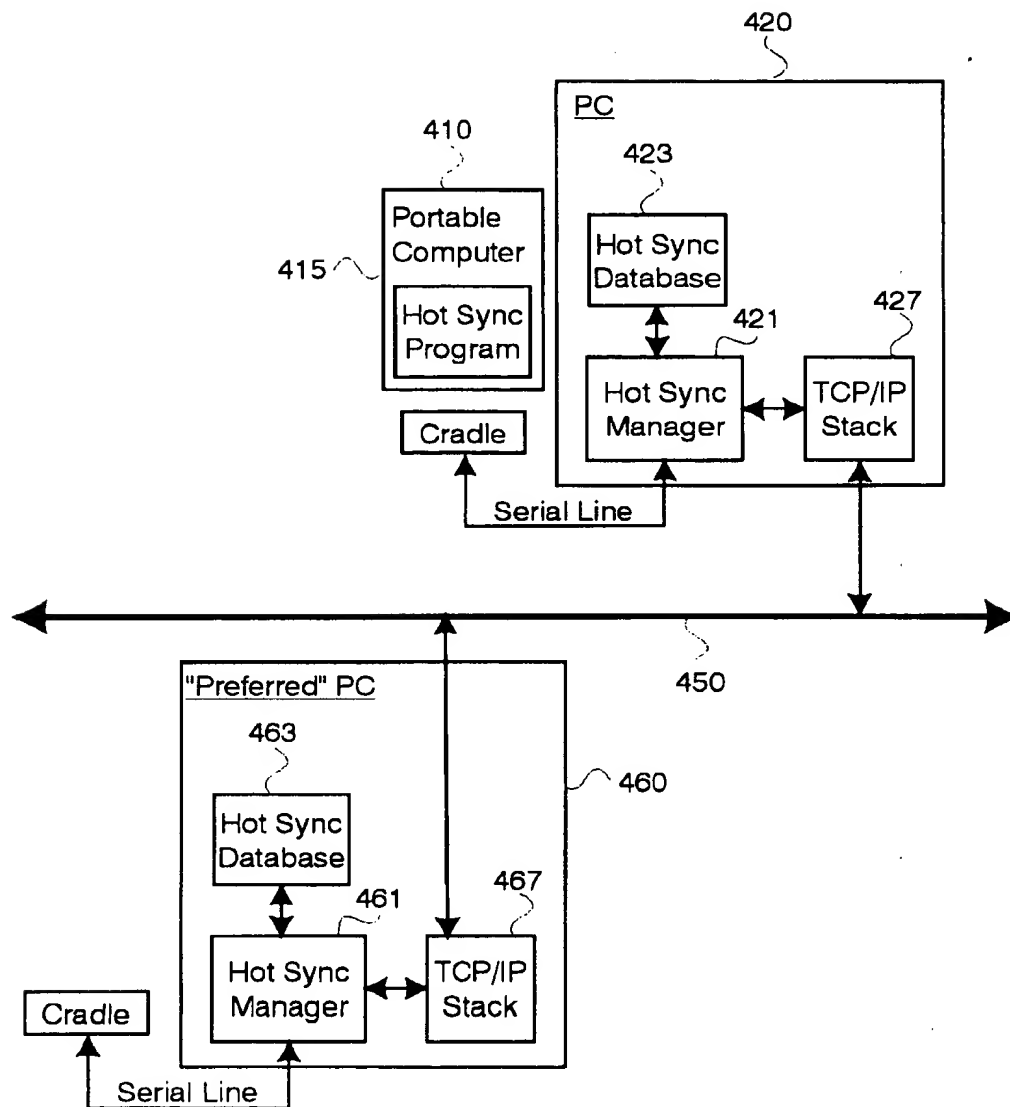
Figure 4

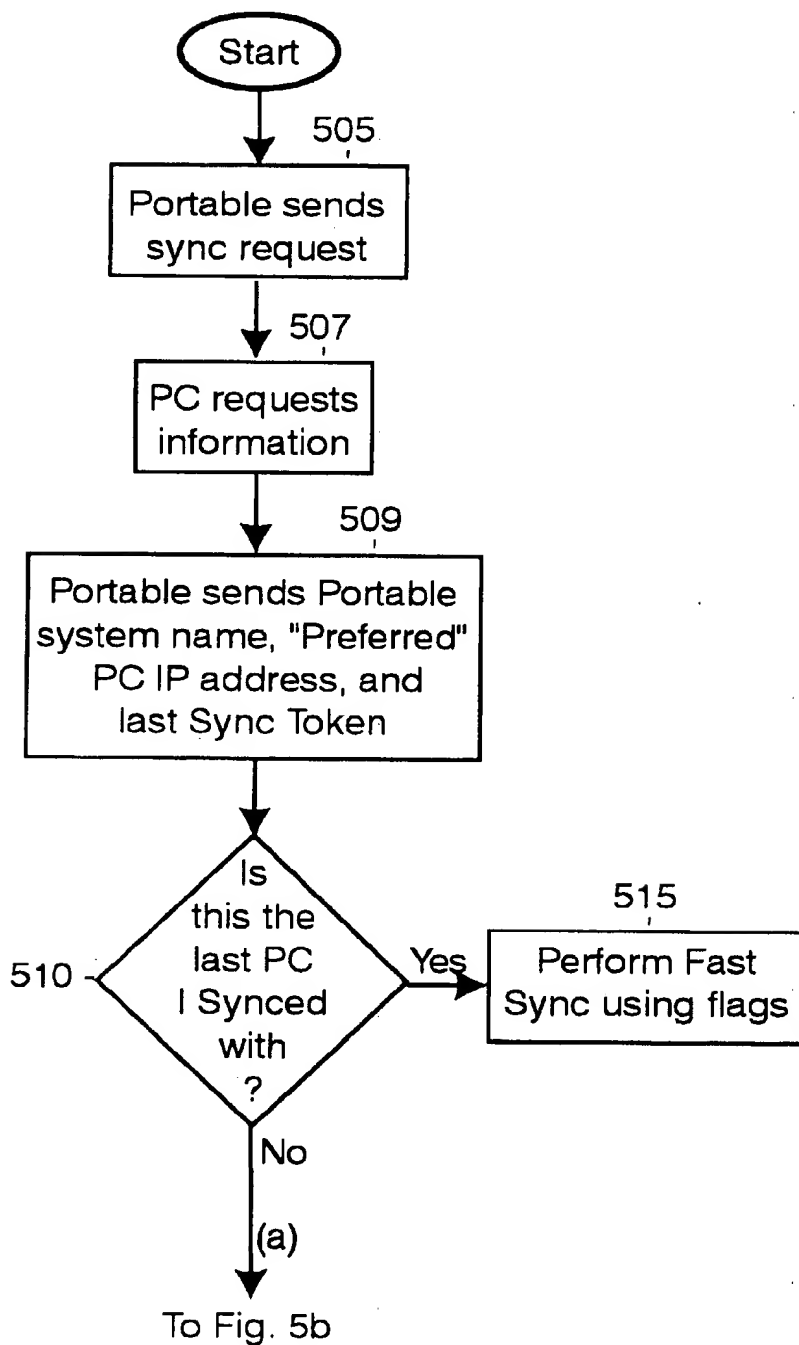
Figure 5a

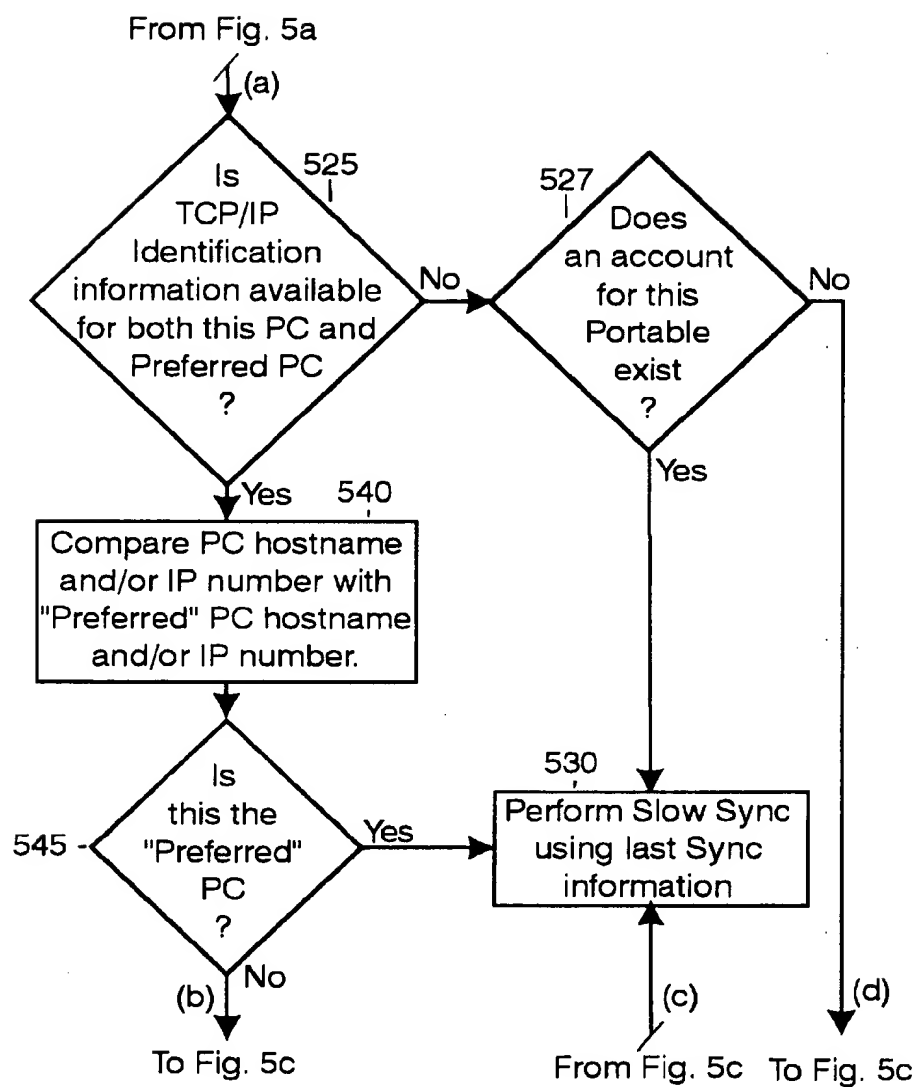
Figure 5b

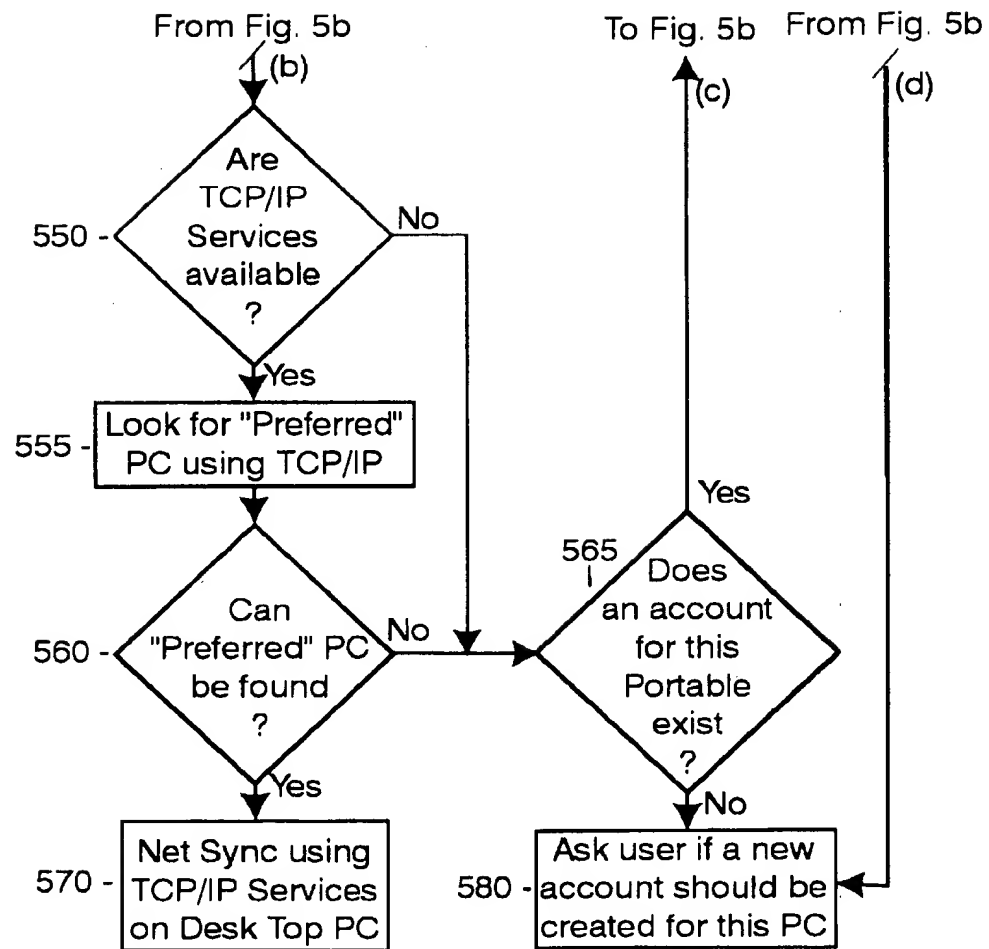
Figure 5c

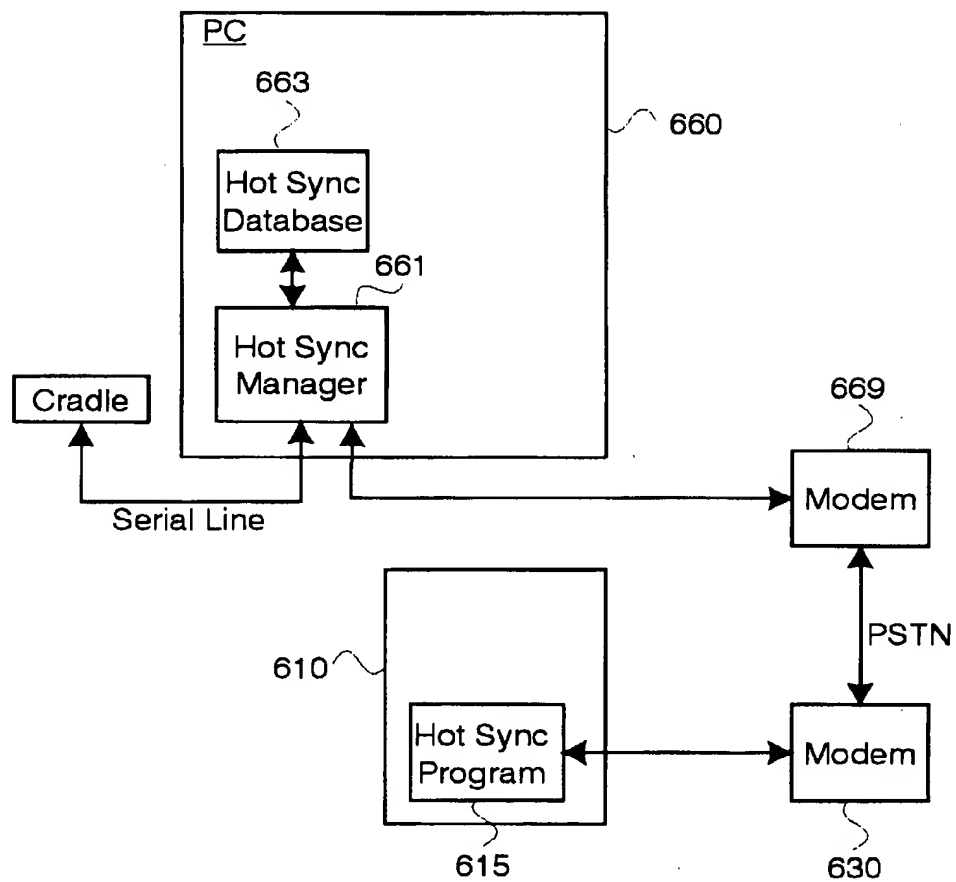
Figure 6a

Figure 6b

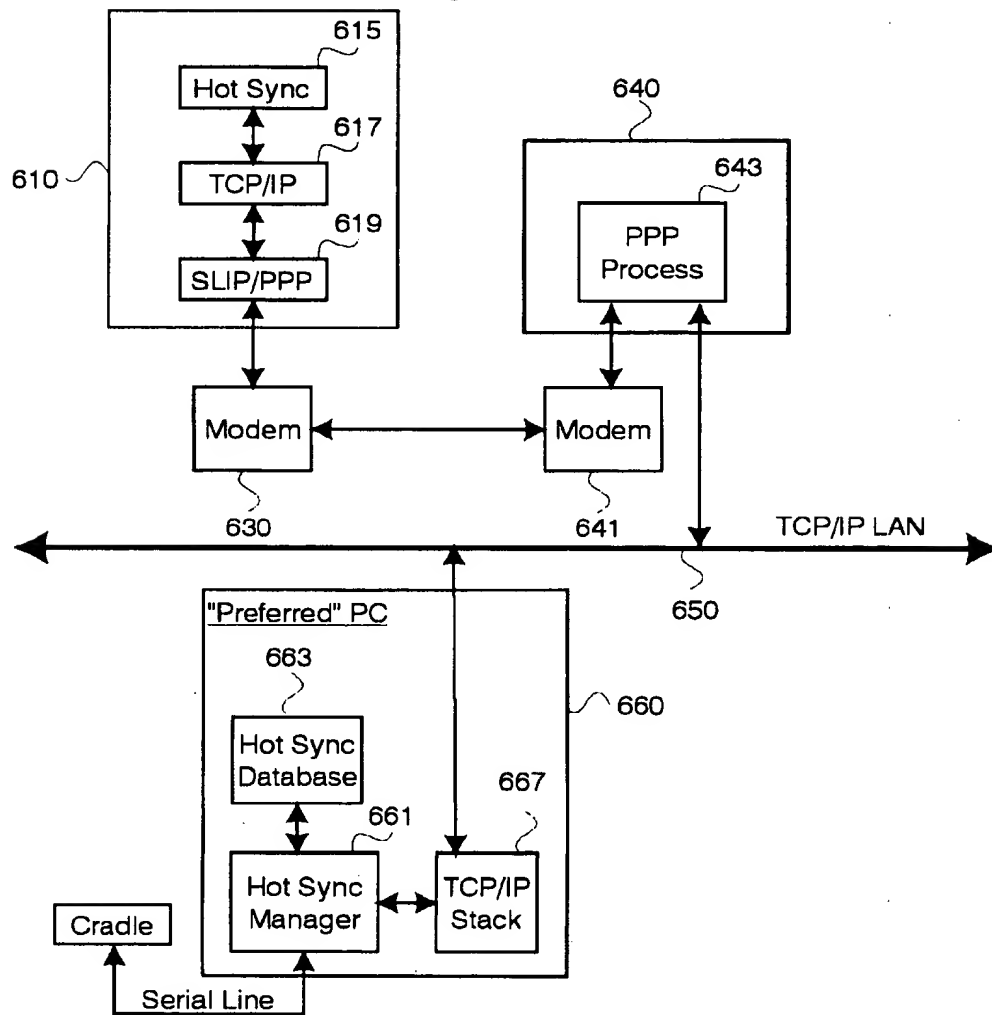
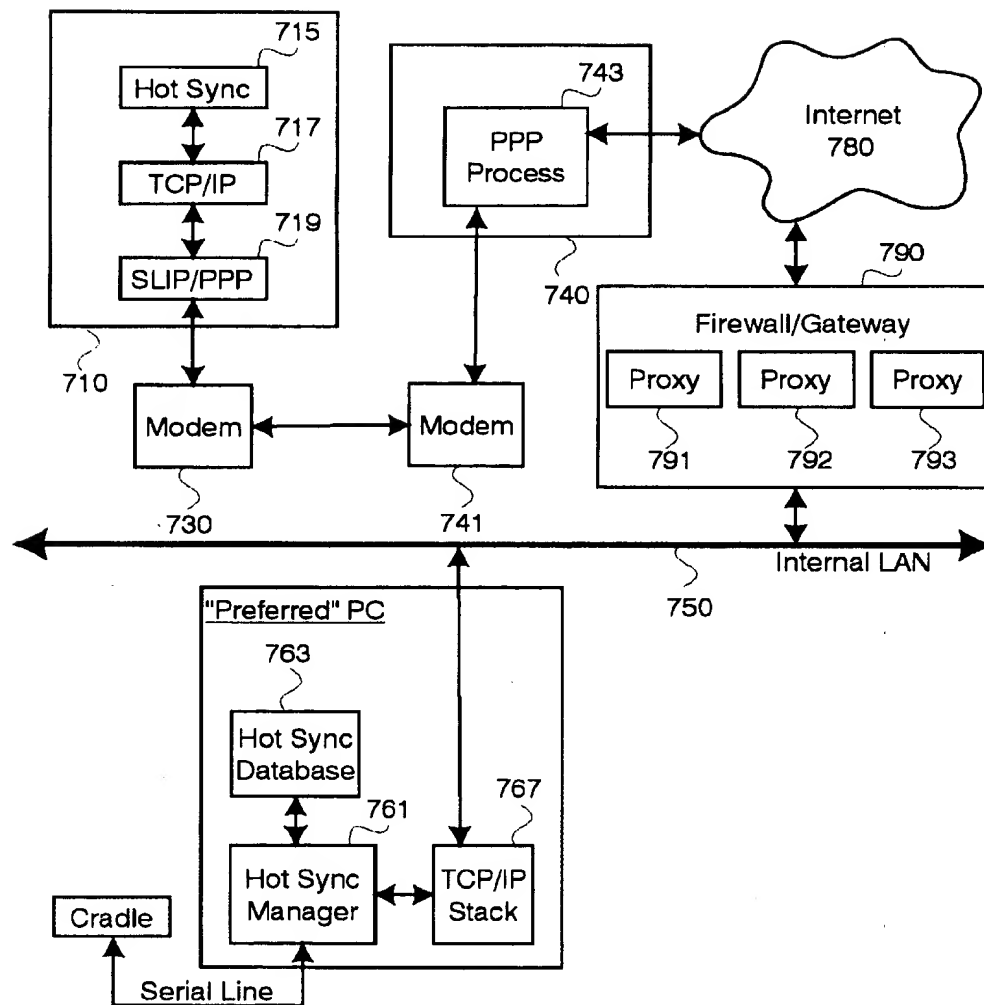


Figure 7

**METHOD AND APPARATUS USING A PASS
THROUGH PERSONAL COMPUTER
CONNECTED TO BOTH A LOCAL
COMMUNICATION LINK AND A
COMPUTER NETWORK FOR
IDENTIFYING AND SYNCHRONIZING A
PREFERRED COMPUTER WITH A
PORTABLE COMPUTER**

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to the field of portable computers systems. Specifically, the present invention discloses a systems for synchronizing a portable computer system with a desktop computer system.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Personal computer systems have become common tools in modern society. To organize their lives, many personal computer users use Personal Information Management (PIM) applications such as an address book, a daily organizer, and a To-Do list applications on their personal computers. Although such Personal Information Management applications have proven useful, their utility is limited by the fact that the person must be sitting at their personal computer system to access the information.

To remedy this limitation, many palmtop computer organizers have been introduced. A palmtop computer organizer is a computer that is small enough to be held in the hand of a user and runs Personal Information Management (PIM) applications such as an address book, a daily organizer, and electronic notepads. Examples of palmtop computer organizers include the Sharp® Zaurus, the Apple® Newton®, and the Tandy® Zoomer™.

However, the palmtop organizers also suffer from a number of limitations. Entering information into a palmtop organizer is usually performed by typing on a keyboard that is too small for normal typing or writing onto a digitizer with a stylus and relying on handwriting recognition software. Backing up the information on a palmtop organizer is often difficult and time consuming task requiring special cables and software. Printing the information stored within a palmtop organizer system is difficult since special printer cables are must be connected to connect the palmtop organizer to a printer.

**SUMMARY AND OBJECTS OF THE
INVENTION**

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a easy to use palmtop computer system that is well integrated with a personal computer system. By tightly integrating the palmtop computer system with a personal computer system, an already existing computer infrastructure can easily be used by the palmtop computer system. To integrate to the computer system, the present invention teaches synchronization of information on the palmtop computer system and the personal computer system.

To integrate the palmtop computer system with a personal computer system in a user friendly manner, the palmtop computer system must be able to handle many different synchronization environments. The palmtop computer system should handle the different synchronization environments in a manner that requires very little user interaction. Thus, the palmtop computer system and the personal computer system must automatically recognized the synchronization environment and perform the synchronization.

Different synchronization environments include: synchronizing multiple palmtop computer systems with a single personal computer system, synchronizing a single palmtop computer system with multiple personal computer systems, synchronizing a palmtop computer system with a remote personal computer system across a network using a local personal computer system, and remotely synchronizing with a personal computer system across a telephone line. The software architecture of the present invention present invention recognizes each of these different synchronization environments and performs the synchronization of information appropriately.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiment of the invention with references to the following drawings.

FIG. 1 illustrates a two portable computer systems and two personal computer systems equipped with cradles for synchronizing with the portable computer systems.

FIG. 2 illustrates a flow diagram that describes how a portable computer system acquires the identification information required to properly perform synchronizations in various environments.

FIG. 3 illustrates a flow diagram that describes how to obtain an address for a preferred synchronization personal computer system.

FIG. 4 illustrates a block diagram that depicts the software architecture for synchronizing a portable computer through a first personal computer to a second personal computer using a network.

FIGS. 5a, 5b, and 5c illustrate a flow diagram describes the beginning of the synchronization between a portable computer system and a personal computer system.

FIG. 6a illustrates a block diagram that depicts the software architecture for synchronizing a portable computer with a personal computer using two modems and the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN).

FIG. 6b illustrates a block diagram that depicts the software architecture for synchronizing a portable computer with a personal computer using a PPP connection between the portable computer system and a network coupled to the personal computer.

FIG. 7 illustrates a block diagram that depicts the software architecture for synchronizing a portable computer with a personal computer using a PPP connection between the portable computer system and an Internet Service Provider (ISP).

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Methods and apparatus for implementing a palmtop computer system that is well integrated with a personal computer system is disclosed. In the following description, for purposes of explanation, specific nomenclature is set forth to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. However, it will be apparent to one skilled in the art that these specific details are not required to practice the present invention. In other instances, well-known circuits and devices are shown in block diagram form to avoid obscuring the present invention.

Basic Synchronization

FIG. 1 illustrates a portable computer system 130. The portable computer system 130 may execute a number of

different computer programs. However, the most common applications on the portable computer system 130 will consist of a suite of Personal Information Management (PIM) applications such as an addressbook, a daily organizer, a To-Do list, and a memo pad. Most people that use a portable computer system 130, also have a personal computer system that has the same applications. It would therefore be desirable to synchronize information between the portable computer system 130 and the personal computer system.

Also illustrated in FIG. 1 is a desktop personal computer system 110. Coupled to the serial port 113 of the desktop personal computer system 110 is a cradle 120. The cradle is used to provide a serial communication link between the portable computer system 130 and the personal computer system 110. Specifically, the serial communication lines from the serial port 113 are extended and terminate at a serial connector 127 on the cradle 120. A matching serial connector (not shown) on the portable computer system 130 connects the portable computer system 130 to the personal computer system 110.

To synchronize the information between the portable computer system 130 and the personal computer system 110, a user drops the portable computer system 130 into the cradle 120 and presses a synchronization button 125. The synchronization button 125 causes a synchronization program on the portable computer system 130 to execute. The synchronization program on the portable computer system 130 wakes up a peer synchronization program on the personal computer system 110. The synchronization program on the portable computer system 130 and the peer synchronization program on the personal computer system 110 perform the necessary operations to synchronize information stored on the two computer systems. The architecture of the synchronization process is described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,727,202 entitled "Method and Apparatus for Synchronizing Multiple Files On Two Different Computer Systems".

To efficiently synchronize the information between the two computer systems, each system maintains a set of status flags for each of the data records. The status flags on each data record identify if the record is new, modified, or deleted. Thus, when a record on the portable computer system 130 or the personal computer system 110 is created, modified, or deleted, the status flags for that record are set to new, modified, or deleted respectively. The status flags on the data records greatly simplify the synchronization process since only the new, modified, or deleted records on each computer system need to be shared with the other computer system. After each synchronization, all the data record status flags are cleared since the two systems have identical databases after the synchronization point.

Synchronization Of A Second Portable Computer System

As described in the previous section, a personal computer system can easily be equipped with a cradle 120 that allows a portable computer system 130 to synchronize with the personal computer system 110. In this manner, the information on the portable computer system 130 can be backed-up on the personal computer system 110.

Each personal computer system usually has ample resources for backing-up several portable computer systems. To back-up another portable computer system, such as portable computer 140, the second portable computer system 140 can be placed into the same cradle 120. When the synchronization button is pushed, the synchronization process begins.

In order to properly back-up the second portable computer system 140, the personal computer system 110 needs to recognize that the second portable computer system 140 is different from the first portable computer system 130 such that the data from the first portable computer system 130 is not destroyed. To accomplish this goal, each portable computer system is assigned a name. Typically, the name of the portable computer system will be the same name as the user of the portable computer system. The name of the portable computer system is assigned when the portable computer system is first synchronized.

Then, when the second portable computer 140 system is inserted into the cradle and synchronized, the personal computer system 110 will recognize that a different portable computer system is being synchronize such that a different database will be used. The first time the second portable computer system 140 is synchronized, the personal computer will ask the user if a new account should be created on the personal computer system 110 for storing information from the second portable computer 140. Thus, a second portable computer can be synchronized on a single personal computer.

Synchronization With A Second Desktop Computer System

The user of a portable computer system may work with more than one personal computer system. For example, many white collar workers that use a personal computer system at an office often have a second personal computer system at home. The second personal computer system allows the worker to work at night, work on weekends, or telecommute by working at home. It would be desirable to allow such a user to synchronize with both the personal computer at the office and the second personal computer system at home.

Referring to FIG. 1, a second personal computer system 150 with a second cradle 160 is illustrated. If the portable computer system 130 is placed into the second cradle 160 and the synchronization button 165 is pressed, then the portable computer system 130 will attempt to synchronize with the second personal computer system 150.

As described in a previous section, the data records on the portable computer system 130 each have flags that specified if the record is new, modified, or deleted since the last synchronization. However, these flags are only relevant to the particular personal computer system that the portable computer system 130 last synchronized with. If the portable computer system 130 has been synchronized with a first personal computer system 110 and then the user later attempts to synchronize the portable computer system 130 with the second personal computer system 150, then the status flags on the data records will only relate to the first personal computer system 110.

Thus, an interesting problem is created when a portable computer system is synchronized with a first personal computer system, used, and then later synchronized with a second personal computer system. To handle the problem, the synchronization program on each personal computer system stores a copy of the reconciled database after each synchronization. The stored database copy is not modified. Then, when a synchronization must be performed wherein the new, modified, deleted record flags are not available, then the entire contents of the portable computer database is read and compared with the stored database. This comparison will yield a set of records that have been created (new), modified, or deleted since the last synchronization. These

new, modified, and delete records can then be used to synchronize with the personal computer's current database. A detailed description of this technique can be found in the U.S. Pat. No. 5,727,202 entitled "Method and Apparatus for Synchronizing Information on Two Different Computer Systems" issued on Mar. 10, 1998. In U.S. Pat. No. 5,727,202, a synchronization that requires the copy of the database from the previous synchronization is known as a "slow sync."

Before the problem of multiple synchronization hosts for a single portable computer can be solved, the problem first must be detected. To detect the problem of synchronizing with multiple personal computers, the portable computer creates a unique synchronization token after each synchronization. The synchronization token is stored by both the portable computer system and the personal computer system. Later, when a synchronization is attempted, the two systems compare synchronization tokens. If the synchronization tokens do not match, then the portable computer system's last synchronization was with a different personal computer system. In such situations, the reconciled database from the previous synchronization with this computer is fetched to perform the current synchronization.

Synchronization Across A Network

Personal computer systems are often coupled together into computer networks. When personal computer systems are coupled together into a network, each computer system can its share resources with the other computer systems coupled to the network. Similarly, each computer system can access the shared resources available from the other computer systems coupled to the network.

When a personal computer that is used to synchronize portable computers is coupled to a network, that network infrastructure can be used to route a synchronization to that "preferred" personal computer. For example, a user of a portable computer system will usually have a personal computer system that is "his" personal computer system. The user will store his personal data such his address lists, his personal calendar, and his To-Do list on his personal computer. New changes to the address list, calendar, and To-Do list will be made to his personal computer. It would therefore be desirable to always synchronize with his personal computer (a "preferred" computer).

Often, the user of a portable computer system will not be near his personal computer system. But if the user is near a personal computer is coupled to his personal computer through a network, the user can synchronize with his personal computer using the network as a communication medium. To perform this synchronization across the network, the portable computer system must store an identifier that can be used to uniquely address the "preferred" personal computer across the network.

An example can be provided by referring again to FIG. 1. In FIG. 1, two personal computers 110 and 150 are illustrated. The two personal computers 110 and 150 are coupled together using a computer network 180. In one embodiment, the computer network 180 uses the TCP/IP suite of protocols. Personal computer 150 will be designated as the user's own personal computer (the "preferred" computer). If the user of portable computer system 130 is near personal computer 110 and wishes to synchronize with his personal computer system 150, the user simply drops his portable computer system into the cradle 120 of the nearby personal computer 110 and presses the synchronization button 125. The synchronization process then commences.

Using the identifier that uniquely addresses the "preferred" computer, the synchronization software in personal

computer 110 attempts to reach the preferred computer across the network 180. If the synchronization software in personal computer 110 can reach the preferred personal computer 150 through the network 180, then the synchronization software in personal computer 110 simply acts as a pass-through and allows the synchronization software in personal computer 150 to perform the synchronization. This type of synchronization is referred to as a "net synchronization." If personal computer 110 can not reach the preferred personal computer 150 through the network 180, then the user may still synchronize with the local personal computer 110.

Obtaining Synchronization Information

As described in the previous sections the present invention uses three pieces of identification information in order to synchronize properly: a portable computer user name; a net address of the personal computer; and a unique synchronization token. These three pieces of information are initialized when the portable computer system is first synchronized. The user name for the portable computer will remain static unless the user specifically requests a change. The net address of the personal computer may change due to a request by the user or an automatic update by the synchronization software. A new unique synchronization token is created every time the portable computer system is synchronized with a personal computer system.

FIG. 2 illustrates a flow diagram of an initialization the occurs during the first synchronization process of a portable computer system. The initialization occurs when the portable computer system is brand new and has never been used or if all the information in the portable computer has been lost due to malfunction or complete battery discharge.

Referring to FIG. 2 the flow diagram starts where the Hot Sync Manager on the personal computer system is monitoring the serial port. (As described in previous sections, the synchronization may be performed with other communication means, but in most cases the first synchronization will be across a serial line.) Then, at step 215, the portable computer requests a synchronization. At step 220, the Hot Sync manager on the personal computer responds to the synchronization request by sending a request for the identification information on the portable computer system. At step 230, the portable computer system sends empty identification fields back to the Hot Sync Manager program on the personal computer since the portable computer system is being used for the first time or has lost all of its information.

Since the portable computer system has not sent any identification information the Hot Sync Manager, the portable computer system is indicating that it is brand new or it has lost its information because of failure. Thus, the Hot Sync Manager on the personal computer system first determines if there is any portable computer system back-up information on the personal computer at step 235. If back-up information for a portable computer system exists on the personal computer, then at step 240 the Hot Sync Manager asks the user if he wishes to restore the portable computer system using the back-up information stored on the personal computer system. If the user requests to restore the portable computer from the back-up information, the Hot Sync Manager proceeds to step 250 where the portable computer system is restored using the back-up copy of information. Otherwise the system proceeds to step 260 where the process of initializing a new portable computer system begins.

The first step in initializing a portable computer is to request a name for the portable computer system as stated in

step 260. In one embodiment, the portable computer system simply asks for the name of the intended user. The user name is assigned to the portable computer system such that the portable computer system can be identified during future synchronizations.

Next, at step 265, the Hot Sync Manager program attempts to obtain a network address for the personal computer system in order to have a "preferred" personal computer system. The Hot Sync Manager program attempts to obtain an IP address, a host name, and a SubNet Mask that will be used to locate the preferred personal computer system during future synchronization operations across a network. The user name and preferred personal computer network address are stored portable computer system at step 270. Finally a unique synchronization token for this synchronization session is given to the portable computer system at step 275. The unique synchronization token will be used next time the portable is synchronized to determine if it is being synchronized on the same computer system that it was last synchronized with.

FIG. 3 illustrates how the Hot Sync Manager Program obtains the network address information for the preferred personal computer. First at step 310 the Hot Sync Manager Program determines if the personal computer has TCP/IP services available. If the personal computer does not have TCP/IP protocol services then the Hot Sync Manager Program simply moves to the next step of the synchronization initialization. In an alternate embodiment, the Hot Sync program retrieves a host name for the personal computer name from a Windows registry. The host name from the registry is then later used to obtain the preferred personal computer address for synchronization operations across a network.

If the personal computer is running TCP/IP protocol, then the Hot Sync Manager proceeds to step 320 where the Hot Sync Manager obtains a host name. The host name may later be used with a Domain name service (DNS) in order to obtain an IP address for the preferred personal computer. After obtaining a host name then the Hot Sync Manager proceeds to step 330 where the Hot Sync Manager determines if the personal computer has been assigned an Internet Protocol (IP) address. If the personal computer has been assigned an IP address then that IP address is stored for future use. Finally, the Hot Sync Manager proceeds to step 340 and attempts to obtain a SubNet Mask.

The Synchronization Process

Once a portable computer system has been initialized with the proper information, the portable computer system can be synchronized with a main desktop personal computer system in a number of different ways. This section will describe how the portable computer systems synchronizes with the personal computer system with reference to the block diagram in FIG. 4 and the flow diagram in FIG. 5.

FIG. 4 illustrates a block diagram of a portable computer system coupled to a personal computer through a serial line for synchronization. The personal computer 420 is also connected to a local area network 450. Other personal computers such as preferred personal computer 460 are also coupled to the network. The portable computer 410 can synchronize either with the local personal computer 420 or the preferred personal computer 460 across the network.

FIG. 5 illustrates a flow diagram that describes one embodiment of the synchronization process in detail. Specifically, FIG. 5 describes most of the steps performed by one embodiment of the Hot Sync Manager program 421 to

determine the synchronization environment. Initially the portable computer systems sends a synchronization request at step 505. In the case where the portable computer 410 is synchronizing through a cradle as illustrated in FIG. 4, the synchronization request is carried across the serial line to the local personal computer 420. The personal computer 420 recognizes the synchronization request packet and responds by sending a request for additional information from the portable computer system 410 at step 507.

In response to the request for additional information, the portable computer 410 sends the three items of identification information as previously described. Specifically, the portable computer system 410 sends the personal computer system 420 the portable system's name, a network address of the preferred personal computer, and the synchronization token received during the previous synchronization at step 509. At step 510 the synchronization program first checks the last synchronization token to determine if this is the same personal computer that the portable computer last synchronized with. If this is synchronization program first checks the last synchronization token to determine if this is the same personal computer that the portable computer last synchronized with, then the Hot Sync Program immediately performs a fast synchronization at step 515.

If this is not the personal computer that the portable computer most recently synchronized with then the synchronization manager program proceeds to step 525 where it determines if network address information is available for both the personal computer 420 on which the Hot Sync Program is running and the "preferred" personal computer requested by the portable computer system.

If network address information is not available for both the current personal computer and the desired personal computer, then the Hot Sync Manager proceeds to step 527 where it may attempt to do some type of local synchronization. At step 527, the Hot Sync manager determines if an account for this portable computer exists on this personal computer. If an account exists on this personal computer for the portable then the Hot Sync Manager proceeds to step 530 where a slow synchronization is performed using the last synchronization information available for the portable computer system. If the account for this portable does not exist, the user is asked if a new account should be created at step 580.

If at step 525, the Hot Sync Manager determines that the network address information is available for both the current personal computer and portable's preferred personal computer then the synchronization process proceeds to step 540. At step 540 the network address of the local personal computer is compared with the network address information of the preferred personal computer. If the two addresses match, then this is the preferred personal computer but portable computer was last synchronized with another personal computer system. In such a situation, the Hot Sync Manager performs a slow synchronization using the information stored from the last synchronization with this personal computer at step 530.

If this is not the preferred the personal computer then the Hot Sync Manager proceeds to step 550 to determine if TCP/IP services are available on this personal computer. If TCP/IP services are not available then a synchronization across a network cannot be performed. Thus, the Hot Sync Manager proceeds to step 565 to determine if a local account for this portable exists. If an account exists, a slow synchronization is performed using the information stored from the last synchronization performed with this personal computer.

If no local account exists then the user will be asked if a new account should be created.

However, if this is not the preferred personal computer and TCP/IP services are available, then the Hot Sync Manager will look across the network for the preferred personal computer at step 555. If the preferred personal computer can be contacted across the network then the synchronization will be performed with the preferred personal computer across the network. In this situation the local Hot Sync Program 421 merely acts as a pass-through such that all synchronization information passes from the local Hot Sync Program 421 to the remote Hot Sync Program 461 on the preferred personal computer 460. Thus, the remote Hot Sync Program 461 takes over the Synchronization process and performs a fast sync or slow sync as necessary.

Remote Synchronization

A person traveling with a portable personal computer system may want to synchronize with a desktop personal computer system while on the road. For example, a traveling executive may wish to receive calendar updates that have been placed into his personal computer by an administrative assistant. One architecture for remotely synchronizing with a desktop personal computer is illustrated in FIG. 6A.

Referring to FIG. 6A, the portable computer 610 with its Hot Sync Program 615 is coupled to a modem 630. The Hot Sync Program 615 is configured such that it can initialize the modem 630 and dial another computer system.

Also illustrated in FIG. 6A is a personal computer system 660 with a Hot Sync Manager Program 661 and a Hot Sync database 663. To monitor for remote synchronizations the Hot sync Manager can be instructed to listen to a serial line coupled to a modem 669. If a ring signal is detected by the modem 669 the Hot Sync Manager 661 will answer the call and attempt to begin a synchronization with a remote portable computer system 610.

To synchronize remotely, the Hot Sync Program 615 on the portable computer 610 configures the modem 630 and dials the modem 669 coupled to desired personal computer 660. The modem 669 notices the ringing phone and informs the Hot Sync Manager 661 on the personal computer 660. The Hot Sync Manager program 661 response by instructing the modem 669 to answer the call. Once the call has been answered, the Hot Sync Manager program 661 listens for a synchronization token. When the Hot Sync Program 615 in the portable computer system 610 notices the call has been answered by another modem, the Hot Sync Program 615 in the portable computer system 610 sends a synchronization request token to the computer that answered. The Hot Sync Manager 661 responds to the synchronization request token by requesting the identification information from the portable computer system 610. The synchronization progresses as described in the previous sections.

Although the remote synchronization system illustrated in FIG. 6A is very useful, it suffers from a few drawbacks. The synchronization system illustrated in FIG. 6A requires a dedicated telephone line and a modem for the Hot Sync Manager 661 on the preferred personal computer 660. Furthermore, the modem 669 is only used to listen for synchronization requests. Additionally, if the user with the portable computer 610 is far away from the personal computer system 660 then a long-distance toll call will be required to synchronize with the personal computer system 660. Therefore an alternate system of remote synchronization is desirable.

FIG. 6B illustrates an alternate embodiment of your remote synchronization system. In the alternate embodiment

of FIG. 6B, the Hot Sync Program 615 communicates through a TCP/IP stack 617 with a Serial Line Internet Protocol (SLIP) or Point-to-Point Protocol (PPP) client program 619 before communicating with modem 630. Thus, by using the TCP/IP stack 617 and a SLIP or PPP client program 619, the Hot Sync Program 615 in FIG. 6B attempts a remote synchronization by performing a net synchronization across a SLIP or PPP link.

To remotely perform a net synchronization, the Hot Sync Program 615 first establishes a SLIP or PPP link with a server that is coupled to the same network as the preferred personal computer. Thus, the SLIP/PPP software using the modem 630 to dial and connect to a modem 641 on a remote access server 640. A SLIP/PPP server process 643 on the remote access server 640 will answer the call and establish a SLIP/PPP session. Once the SLIP/PPP session has been created the Hot Sync Program 615 can use the network address of the preferred personal computer to access the Hot Sync Manager Program on the preferred personal computer that is coupled to the TCP/IP Local Area Network 650. The Hot Sync Manager in the preferred personal computer will be monitoring the TCP/IP packets for a synchronization request across the TCP/IP LAN. If the Hot Sync Manager 661 on the preferred personal computer gets such a synchronization request packet, then the Hot Sync Manager 661 begins a synchronization with the portable computer system.

The TCP/IP based remote synchronization system can be performed using the global Internet. FIG. 7 illustrates an example of a portable computer system 710 synchronizing with a preferred PC 760 across the global Internet 780. Specifically the Hot Sync Program 715 in the global computer system establishes a PPP or SLIP connection with an Internet Service Provider (ISP) 740. The SLIP/PPP session is established between the SLIP/PPP client on the portable computer system 710 and a SLIP/PPP server 743 at the ISP 740. The SLIP/PPP server at the ISP 740 can communicate across the global Internet to any Internet addressable location. Thus, if the network address of the preferred personal computer 760 is accessible through the global internet 780 then the global computer system 710 can communicate with the preferred personal computer 716 to perform a remote synchronization.

Many businesses, however, install firewall servers or gateway servers 790 on their Local Area Network as illustrated in FIG. 7. The firewall server acts as a protection mechanism to protect the internal Local Area Network 750 of a company from attacks by unscrupulous Internet users. One method of protecting the internal Local Area Network is to require any communication with the global Internet to pass through a proxy application. In FIG. 7, proxy applications 791, 792 and 793 are used to bridge various communication protocols. Each proxy application filters the packets associated with its respective protocol before allowing the packets to access the internal Local Area Network 750. If such firewall system is installed at the corporation of a user who wishes to synchronize a portable computer, then a proxy application for the specific synchronization protocol may be required.

Although the present invention has been described in terms of specific exemplary embodiments, it will be appreciated that various modifications and alterations might be made by those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as set forth in the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A computer implemented method of synchronizing information on a portable computer with a preferred per-

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sonal computer, said preferred personal computer having identification information, said method comprising the steps of:

- initiating a first synchronization process in a first personal computer to synchronize information stored on said portable computer, said portable computer coupled to said first personal computer through a local communication link, said portable computer having an identifier for said preferred personal computer;
 - determining if said first personal computer is said preferred personal computer by comparing said identifier for said preferred computer with said identification information on said first personal computer system;
 - synchronizing information on said portable computer with information on said first personal computer if said first personal computer is said preferred personal computer, else
 - locating said preferred personal computer on a computer network coupled to said first personal computer;
 - initiating a second synchronization process in said preferred personal computer from said first personal computer system; and
 - synchronizing said information stored on said portable computer with information on said preferred personal computer through said first personal computer system and across said network.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein said identifier for said preferred personal computer system comprises a network address of said preferred personal computer system.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein said synchronization process on said first personal computer acts as a pass-through to said second synchronization process on said preferred personal computer system.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein a third synchronization process on said portable computer system requests a synchronization with said first synchronization process in said first personal computer system.
5. The method of claim 1 wherein said computer network implements the TCP/IP suite of protocols.
6. An apparatus for synchronizing information between computer systems, said apparatus comprising:
- a portable computer system, said portable computer system having a first identifier for a preferred personal computer system that said portable computer system normally synchronizes with;
 - a first personal computer system, said first personal computer having a second identifier;
 - a local communication link coupling said portable computer system with said first personal computer system;
 - a second personal computer system, said second personal computer having a third identifier;
 - a computer network, said computer network coupling said first personal computer system to said second personal computer system; and
 - a first synchronization program on said first personal computer system, said first synchronization program synchronizing with said portable computer system if said second identifier for said first personal computer system matches said first identifier for said preferred computer system, else said first synchronization pro-

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gram transmitting information from said portable computer system across said computer network to said second personal computer if said third identifier for said second personal computer matches said first identifier for said preferred computer system.

7. The apparatus of claim 6 further comprising:

- a second synchronization program on said second computer system, said second synchronization program on said second computer system synchronizing information on said second computer system with information on said portable computer system through said first synchronization program on said first computer system.

8. The apparatus of claim 6 wherein said computer network comprises a network running the TCP/IP suite of protocols.

9. The apparatus of claim 6 wherein said local communication link comprises a serial communications link.

10. The apparatus of claim 7 wherein said second synchronization program monitors said computer network for packets requesting a synchronization.

11. The apparatus of claim 6 further comprising:

- a third synchronization program on said portable computer system, said third synchronization program synchronizing with said second synchronization program on said second computer system through said first personal computer system.

12. A computer implemented method of synchronizing information on a portable computer with information on a preferred personal computer system, said method comprising the steps of:

initiating a first synchronization process in said portable computer, said first synchronization process having a first identifier for said preferred personal computer system;

initiating a remote communication link between said first synchronization process in said portable computer and a first personal computer system, said first personal computer system coupled to a computer network;

executing a second synchronization process on said first personal computer, said first personal computer having a second identifier; and

synchronizing said information on said portable computer system with information on said first personal computer system if said first identifier matches said second identifier, else

locating said preferred personal computer coupled to said computer network using said first identifier;

requesting a synchronization with a second synchronization process in said preferred personal computer by sending a synchronization request packet across said computer network; and

synchronizing said information stored on said portable computer with information on said preferred personal computer through said remote communication link and said computer network.

13. The method of claim 12 wherein said computer network implements the TCP/IP suite of protocols.

14. The method of claim 12 wherein said remote communication link comprises a PPP connection.

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